

Multi-Station RF Thermometer and Alarm System

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CROSS-REFERENCE TO RELATED APPLICATIONS

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This invention is a division of allowed continuation-in-part application serial number 09/421,974 filed October 20, 1999, which is a continuation of United States utility patent application serial number 08/968,290 filed November 12, 1997, now USP 6,046, 674, each incorporated herein by reference.

FIELD OF THE INVENTION

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This invention is drawn to the field of telemetry, and more particularly, to a novel multi-station RF thermometer and alarm system.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

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Many of life's activities are heavily influenced by the temperature. Heretofore, hard-wired digital thermometers, such as the model IOTA1 and the model IOTA2 commercially available from TREND Industries, Inc., or the Electronic Weather Station With Alarm Clock, commercially available from CATHAY PACIFIC, measure temperature by a hard-wired probe, and display the measured temperature on an associated display. Such hard-wired digital thermometers, however, need to be placed within inches or feet of the environment to be measured. This can be inconvenient, as this type of digital thermometer is not placed where it is most accessible and likely to be needed (e.g., next to a bed, on a desk, etc.), but where it must be placed to work.

Wireless (RF) digital thermometers, such as the model "7055" Wireless Weather Station With Radio Controlled Clock, commercially available from Europe Supplies, Ltd., measure

temperature by a remote wireless temperature station and display the measured temperature on a display associated with a base station. Although in principle such transmitters may be remotely located to the base, environmental noise sources have generally limited their practical range and have given rise to erroneous telemetry and lack of operator confidence. And if more than one location needs to be monitored, another such RF transmitter and base pair needs to be provided for every location to be measured. Not only has this resulted in increased overall costs, and undesirable multiplication of base stations, but the utility of such transmitter/base pairs has further been limited by contention-induced interference as transmissions from the multiple transmitters collide at each base station.

Moreover, both the hard-wired and RF temperature thermometers heretofore have had their utility limited by probe placement difficulties, whenever locations that are other than directly exposed and in the open are to be monitored, and by a general inability to provide information of comfort level or of weather situations that may endanger well-being.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

Accordingly, it is an object of the present invention to disclose a multi-station RF thermometer and alarm system suitable for home, office and light industrial use.

It is another object of the present invention to disclose a multi-station RF thermometer and alarm system that provides temperature monitoring of plural remote locations and at a local base station.

It is another object of the present invention to disclose a multi-station RF thermometer and alarm station that provides reliable temperature or other weather parameter, such as humidity, transmission and reception in the presence of interference (environmental noise interference and contention-induced interference).

It is another object of the present invention to disclose a multi-station RF thermometer and alarm system that provides user-setable alarm limits for each of multiple remote and/or local locations and that provides alarm signals whenever out-of-bounds conditions prevail at any location.

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It is another object of the present invention to disclose a multi-station RF thermometer and alarm system that provides accurate temperature or other weather parameter, such as humidity, sensing and transmission over wide temperature, humidity and distance ranges in a manner that requires low power consumption suitable for long-life battery operation.

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It is another object of the present invention to disclose a multi-station RF thermometer and alarm system that responds to temperature and humidity telemetry and provides heat index information not only useful as a general comfort indicator, but may also prove invaluable in times when high temperature and high humidity can lead to dangerous heat stroke levels.

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In accord therewith, the disclosed multi-station RF thermometer and alarm system of the present invention includes at least one portable, battery-powered temperature station and a multi-station base station. Each of the at least one portable, battery-powered temperature stations provides, as desired, measurement of temperatures in rooms, refrigeration devices, pools, outdoor areas, etc., and the multi-station base station, which may be placed on a desk, at bedside, or otherwise as convenient, receives and displays, preferably concurrently, the measured temperature data received from the one or more portable, battery-powered temperature stations and measured at the multi-station base station.

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In one preferred embodiment, each temperature station transmits remote temperature measurements over a two-hundred and fifty foot (250') range to the multi-station base station and is operable over an active indoor/outdoor temperature range from minus forty degrees (-40) 0F to one hundred and fifty eight (158)0F. In this embodiment, the multi-station base station receives and displays temperature from up to four (4) remote transmitters.

Accordingly to one aspect of the present invention, the portable, battery-powered temperature station includes an analog temperature sensor providing a temperature signal representative of sensed temperature; an antenna; and a processor-controlled transmitter coupled to the antenna and to the temperature signal operative (1) to periodically convert the temperature
5 signal to a digital representation of the sensed temperature, (2) to digitally encode a data frame having first information representative of the sensed temperature and second information representative of station ID, and (3) to transmit a predetermined integral number greater than one (1) of data frames each having said first and said second information at a random time. The randomized transmission times, and redundantly encoded temperature and transmitter ID data,
10 cooperate to alleviate collision-induced contention and to provide reliable data transmission in noisy environments. In this embodiment, the temperature data is read every thirty (30) seconds and five (5) redundant data frames are randomly transmitted once every thirty (30) to sixty (60) seconds.

Accordingly to a further aspect of the present invention, the portable, battery-powered temperature station includes an analog temperature sensor providing a temperature signal representative of sensed temperature; an antenna; and a processor-controlled transmitter coupled to the antenna and to the temperature signal operative (1) to periodically convert the temperature
15 signal to a digital representation of the sensed temperature, (2) to generate a schedule of present and future random transmission times, (3) to digitally encode a data frame having first information representative of the sensed temperature, second information representative of station ID, and third information representative of the schedule of present and future random transmission times and
20 (4) to transmit a predetermined integral number of data frames each having said first, said second and said third information at a random time. The schedule of present and future random transmission times allows the multi-station base station to "sleep" at times when no transmissions
25 are scheduled, or when previous transmissions indicate very little temperature change, thereby conserving power enabling long-life battery-powered base station operation.

According to another aspect of the present invention, the disclosed portable, battery-powered temperature station includes a housing; a waterproof probe electrically connected to the housing via an elongated flexible cable of predetermined length; an attachment member for stowing the probe to the housing when not in use; and means for paying out any selected length of the elongated flexible cable of predetermined length selected to accommodate the needs of each particular application. In one preferred embodiment, the housing includes a front wall and a battery receiving compartment, and the attachment member includes a well formed in the front wall of the housing dimensioned to frictionally receive the probe, and the pay-out means includes a wire-receiving chamber provided in the battery compartment of the housing. The selectably extendable probe enables to measure hard-to-reach areas, such as the water temperature of an outdoor pool or the inside temperature of a storage freezer.

According to another aspect of the present invention, the disclosed multi-station base station includes a multi-field reconfigurable display; operator input means; a receiver for providing an output signal in response to transmissions received from each at least one portable, battery-powered temperature station; and a processor coupled to the display, to the input means, and to the receiver, that is operative in a decode/display mode, an alarm set mode, and an alarm announce mode.

In the decode/display mode, the processor is operative (1) to configure the display with a field that corresponds to each of multiple temperature station zones, (2) to recover from the output signal of the receiver the first information representative of sensed temperature and the second information representative of the transmitting station ID for each data frame of the redundantly transmitted data frames, and (3) to display the recovered temperature data in a field corresponding to an identified station if the first information representative of the sensed temperature of two (2) of the redundantly transmitted data frames conform to each other for a given station.

In one preferred embodiment, the display is configured with a comparatively-large "active" location field, with five (5) temperature station fields (four (4) remote station and one (1) base

station fields), and with temperature high and low fields, and the processor is operative in the decode/display mode to display the current temperature of any temperature station in the comparatively large "active" location field and the daily high and low temperatures in the corresponding high and low temperature fields in response to operator input station selection, and to concurrently display the temperature at any active locations (remote and/or base) in the corresponding ones of the five (5) temperature station fields. Other display configurations, such as concurrent and/or sequential display of less than all of the active locations, and operator input station display selection, could be employed.

In the alarm set mode, the processor is operative to configure the display with alarm min and alarm max fields and with at least one alarm set station field, and is operative in response to operator input station (base or remote) selection, in response to operator input alarm min and max values selection and in response to operator input alarm arming to set and to display min and max temperature bounds for each station selected and armed. Min/max setpoints for temperature range may be set for all locations. If the temperature in any location goes outside this set range, an alarm (visible, audible and/or remote) signal indication is provided in alarm announce mode. In the preferred embodiments, all stations that have been armed are concurrently displayed, although sequential display in response to operator input station display selection could be employed.

In alarm announce mode, the processor is operative to configure the display with an alarm announce icon field and at least one active alarm station field, and is operative (1) to display a location where an active alarm condition exists in the active alarm station field, (2) to provide an alarm signal indication, and (3) is operative in response to operator alarm dis-arm input to clear the alarm condition for each alarm location. The alarm signal may be an audible, a visible, and/or a remote alarm signal. In the preferred embodiments, all stations that have active alarm conditions are concurrently displayed, although sequential display in response to operator input station display selection could be employed.

In one embodiment, the multi-station base station is AC outlet powered, and in other embodiments, it is battery-powered.

In further disclosed embodiments, each portable, battery-powered weather station is operative to alternatively transmit percent relative humidity and temperature data redundantly in accord with a schedule of transmission times unique to each portable, battery-powered weather station. The redundant transmission of weather data helps prevent noise interference at the multi-station base station, and the unique schedules of transmission times both help prevent contention-induced interference at the multi-station base station as well as allow the multi-station base station to enter battery-power-conserving mode when no receptions are scheduled from each of the portable weather stations.

For each of the portable, battery-powered weather stations that measure and transmit temperature and percent relative humidity data, the multi-station base station selectably calculates and displays heat index information.

A method of encoding data at the portable, battery-powered weather stations to maximize transmission range and detection sensitivity at the battery-powered multi-station base station is disclosed.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

These and other objects, inventive aspects, and advantageous features will become apparent as the invention becomes better understood by referring to the following detailed description of the presently preferred embodiments, and to the drawings, wherein:

FIGURE 1 is a functional block diagram of the multi-station RF thermometer and alarm system of the present invention;

FIGURE 2 is an elevational view of the front of one embodiment of the portable, battery-powered temperature station of the present invention;

FIGURE 3 is a perspective view of the back of the portable, battery-powered temperature station of the present invention with the battery door and wall mounting bracket removed;

FIGURE 4 is a functional block diagram of the portable, battery-powered temperature station of the multi-station RF thermometer and alarm system of the present invention;

FIGURE 5 is a diagram illustrating the data format of the portable, battery-powered temperature station of the present invention;

FIGURE 6 is a schematic circuit diagram of the RF oscillator of the portable, battery-powered temperature station of FIGURE 4;

FIGURE 7 is a flow chart of the processor of the portable, battery-powered temperature station of FIGURE 4;

FIGURE 8 is a front elevational view of one embodiment of the multi-station base station of the multi-station RF thermometer and alarm system of the present invention;

FIGURE 9 is a functional block diagram of the multi-station base station of the present invention;

FIGURE 10 is a schematic circuit diagram of the receiver of the multi-station base station of FIGURE 9;

FIGURE 11 is a state diagram of the processor of the multi-station base station of FIGURE 9;

FIGURES 12-14 are pictorial diagrams illustrating the multi-field reconfigurable display of the multi-station base station of FIGURE 9 respectively configured in decode/display mode, alarm set mode and alarm announce mode;

FIGURE 15 is a flow chart of the processor of the multi-station base station of FIGURE 9;

FIGURE 16 is an elevational view of the front of another embodiment of a portable, battery-powered weather station of the present invention;

FIGURE 17 is a functional block diagram of the portable, battery-powered weather station of the multi-station RF thermometer and alarm system of the present invention;

FIGURE 18 is a diagram illustrating the data format of the portable, battery-powered weather station of the present invention;

FIGURE 19 is a flow chart of the processor of the portable, battery-powered weather station of FIGURE 17;

FIGURE 20 illustrates in the FIGURES 20A-20C thereof front elevational views of another embodiment of a battery-powered multi-station base station of the multi-station RF thermometer and alarm system of the present invention for use with the portable, battery-powered weather station of FIGURES 16-19;

FIGURE 21 is a functional block diagram of the multi-station base station of the present invention;

FIGURE 22 is a state diagram of the processor of the multi-station base station of FIGURE 21; and

FIGURE 23 is a flow chart of the processor of the multi-station base station of FIGURE 21.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE PRESENTLY PREFERRED EMBODIMENTS

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Referring now to FIGURE 1, generally designated at 10 is a functional block diagram of the multi-station RF thermometer and alarm system in accord with the present invention. The system 10 includes a plurality of RF thermometers or other weather stations 12 to be described and a multichannel base station 14 in spaced apart relation to the plural RF thermometers 12. The system 10 is adapted for home, office and light industrial use. The RF thermometers 12 are portable, battery-powered devices that may be placed anywhere where temperatures are to be monitored. For example, one temperature transmitter 12 could be attached to the back of the house, another in the pool, a third in a green house, and a fourth in the garden, not shown.

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The multi-channel base station 14 includes a receiver, not shown, to be described that receives the temperatures or other weather data transmitted by the plural RF thermometers 12 and displays temperature data received from the plural RF thermometers 12 on display 16. The multichannel base station 14 also displays the temperature at the base station by means of the display 16. In the presently preferred embodiments, the display 16 displays the temperature at the base station 14, as well as the temperatures at each of the remote RF thermometers 12, concurrently. Other temperature display methodologies, such as sequential display of the temperatures at plural remote and base station locations may be employed.

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The multichannel base station 14 monitors the temperature data received from each of the plural remote RF thermometers 12 and the base station 14 and compares the received temperatures and the base station temperature to user-settable alarm limits to be described for each remote location and the base station. In the preferred embodiments, the alarm limits are minimum and maximum limits independently user settable for each location (base and remote). If the received temperatures and the local base station temperature are out of the bounds set by the alarm limits

for any location, the multichannel base station 14 provides an alarm as schematically illustrated by box 18. The alarm 18 in the preferred embodiment includes an audible and a visible alarm signal.

5 A remote dialer 20 is connected to the multichannel base station 14. The remote dialer 20 is connected to a remote station 22 via the phone network 24. The remote dialer 20 sends all temperature data to the remote display 22 at preset times, or when alarm conditions exist at any location.

10 The remote station 22 receives and displays all temperature or other data sent by the remote dialer 22. The remote station 22 may dial the remote dialer 20 via the phone network 24 to request the current temperature data for any location, as well as the corresponding alarm limits.

15 The remote station 22 preferably includes a DTMF generator and a DTMF listener, not shown, that cooperate to send control information via the phone lines, and to receive data back from the multi-station base station in accord with the control information sent. The remote user into this way may, for example, request the current temperature information from all stations (remote and base) from the multi-station base station.

20 To manage interference (contention-based interference arising from the plural RF thermometers competing with the multichannel base station as well as noise interference arising in the intended operating environment), the multi-station RF thermometer and alarm system 10 of the present invention employs four (4) principal measures. First, each RF thermometer 12 and the multichannel base station 14 in one embodiment are provided with dual, user selectable
25 channels "A" and "B" to be described. For example, interference from another multi-station RF thermometer and alarm system operating in the same locale may be eliminated by switching from one to the other of the two (2) channels. Second, each RF thermometer 12 in one embodiment transmits its temperature data at random times, preferably once every thirty (30) to sixty (60) seconds. The randomness of the transmissions makes it statistically unlikely that temperature data

from multiple RF thermometers arrive simultaneously at the multichannel base station 14. In another embodiment, each RF weather station 12 transmits its temperature and/or humidity data in accord with a schedule of transmission times unique to each weather station. Third, each RF thermometer 12 transmits redundant temperature and station ID information. In one embodiment, five (5) redundant data frames constitute the data telemetry. Should environmental noise sources corrupt part of the telemetry, the multichannel base station 14 would be able to recover any uncorrupted part thereof. Fourth, the multichannel base station 14 maintains a record of time of receipt for each RF thermometer 12 data transmission and updates temperature data received from the plural RF thermometers 12 provided the same is received within a predetermined time window. So long as the temperature data from each channel (station) is received within the predetermined time window, preferably fifteen (15) minutes in one embodiment and one (1) hour in another embodiment, from the time of last receipt, the multichannel base station updates the temperature information it maintains for each channel. Otherwise, it provides an indication of an inoperable channel. These channel recovery windows should be sufficient for most noisy environments, although a different duration window could be employed.

Referring now to FIGURE 2, generally designated at 40 is an elevational view of the front of one embodiment of the RF thermometer of the multi-station RF thermometer and alarm system of the present invention. The RF thermometer 40 includes a water-resistant housing 42 having O-ring seals, not shown, a well generally designated 44 integrally formed in the housing 42 for receiving a temperature probe, and a waterproof temperature probe 46 shown received in the probe receiving well 44. The waterproof probe 46 is connected to the housing 42 via an elongated flexible cable 48 of predetermined length, preferably ninety (90) centimeters. A display 50 for displaying the temperature sensed by the probe 46 is mounted to the housing 42. The RF thermometer 40 is battery-powered, is operational from minus fifty (-50) to plus seventy (+70) Co, has a range of sixty (60) meters obstructed (i.e. through walls), an accuracy of +/- .5 Co and a minus forty (-40) to a plus forty (+40)Co range for reliable temperature measurement.

Referring now to FIGURE 3, generally designated at 60 is a perspective view of the back of the portable, battery-powered RF transmitter of the multi-station RF thermometer and alarm system of the present invention with its battery door and wall mounting bracket removed. Chamber generally designated 62 defined in the battery receiving compartment provides a space in which the cable 48 may be looped and stored between batteries 64. Any selected length of the cable 48 of predetermined length may be payed-out of the chamber 42 to allow the waterproof probe 46 to reach intended temperature measurement locations as determined by the needs of each particular applications environment.

As shown, channel "A" and "B" selector and station ID switches 66, 68 are preferably mounted in the battery compartment, although any other suitable location therefor could be employed.

Referring now to FIGURE 4, generally designated at 70 is a functional block diagram of the portable, battery-powered RF thermometer of the multi-station RF thermometer and alarm system of the present invention. Digital controller 72, operatively connected to RAM memory and ROM memory, not shown, is connected to channel setting and station identifying DIP switches 74, temperature sensor 76, LCD display 78, and a three hundred and fifteen (315) megahertz RF oscillator 80. The channel set switches 74 preferably are two (2) DIP switches (containing four (4) SPST switches each), each for channel "A" and for channel "B". In use, each RF thermometer is set to a different four (4) bit ID code on either channel, and the receiver is set to either bank A or bank B. This minimizes the problem of interference from a neighboring multi-station RF thermometer and alarm system, and/or from environmental sources of interference. Although channel selecting and station identifying DIP switches are presently preferred, other channel setting and/or station identifying means in the transmitter could be employed.

The controller 72 preferably is a OKI Semiconductor MSM64162 microcontroller (with internal RAM and ROM). The temperature sensor 76 preferably is a Semitec 103AT-2B thermistor. The LCD display 78 preferably is a custom-manufactured display.

The controller 72 (1) measures the resistance of the thermistor of the temperature sensor 76 and numerically calculates the temperature corresponding thereto, (2) encodes a data packet having redundant first data representative of the sensed temperature and redundant second data representative of the transmitter ID and (3) controls the RF oscillator 80 to transmit a data frame having the encoded data packets at random time. In addition, the controller 72 performs the functions of displaying the temperature on the liquid crystal display 78 and checking the battery voltage.

In one preferred embodiment, the controller 72 transmits eight hundred eighty five (885) millisecond data packets on a randomized schedule of approximately twice per minute, randomly selected every thirty (30) to sixty (60) seconds, with no less than thirty seconds between transmissions. The average duty cycle of any one hundred (100) millisecond portion of the transmission does not exceed fifty (50) percent, permitting a six (6) dB increase in the peak output power from the transmitter. The eight hundred and eighty five (885) millisecond transmission consists of a preamble followed by five (5) identical data frames as shown in FIGURE 5. A Manchester-like encoding technique is preferably used for the data frames.

A preamble signals the start of transmission and allows the data slicer time to stabilize before the data is sent. Each data frame contains a wait (low) pulse, a sync (high) pulse, a start (low) pulse, a sixteen (16) bit channel ID word, a four (4) bit setup word and a sixteen (16) bit BCD temperature word.

The preamble is a square-wave train, consisting of twenty (20) high pulses and nineteen (19) low pulses. The wait pulse is low for two (2) bit periods. The sync pulse is high for four (4) bit periods. The start pulse is low for two (2) bit periods. The data is sent as (bit) followed by (complement of bit). Thus, the sixteen (16) bit ID word is represented by thirty two (32) bits, the four (4) bit setup word is represented by eight (8) bits, and the sixteen (16) bit temperature word is represented by thirty two (32) bits. The complete transmission is four hundred and thirty nine (439) bit periods in duration.

Example of Complete Transmission:

Channel ID = 1101 0011 0101 100 = D358

Temperature = 024.7

(preferably transmitted in oF) = 000 0010 0100 0111 = 0247

5 Setup Word = (positive temperature, unused bit, unused bit, battery good) = 1010

The bits are converted so 0's are represented by 01 and 1's are represented by 10. Using this, the data becomes:

Channel ID = 1010 0110 0101 1010 0110 0110 1001 0101

10 Setup Word = 1001 1001

Temperature = 0101 0101 0101 1001 0110 0101 0110 1010

Actual Transmission:

1010 1010 1010 1010 1010 1010 1010 1010 1010 101 preamble

00 wait

FRAME 1

1111 sync

00 start

1010 0110 0101 1010 0110 0110 1001 0101 channel ID

1001 1001 setup data

0101 0101 0101 1001 0110 0101 0110 1010 temperature

00 wait

FRAME 2

1111 sync

00 start

1010 0110 0101 1010 0110 0110 1001 0101 channel ID

1001 1001 setup data

0101 0101 0101 1001 0110 0101 0110 1010 temperature

00 wait

FRAME 3

1111 sync

00 start

1010 0110 0101 1010 0110 0110 1001 0101 channel ID

1001 1001 setup data

5 0101 0101 0101 1001 0110 0101 0110 1010 temperature

00 wait

FRAME 4

1111 sync

00 start

10 1010 0110 0101 1010 0110 0110 1001 0101 channel ID

1001 1001 setup data

0101 0101 0101 1001 0110 0101 0110 1010 temperature

00 wait

FRAME 5

1111 sync

00 start

1010 0110 0101 1010 0110 0110 1001 0101 channel ID

1001 1001 setup data

0101 0101 0101 1001 0110 0101 0110 1010 temperature

20 The entire transmission consists of four hundred thirty nine (439) bits in eight hundred eighty five (885) milliseconds, with a bit duration of 2.016 milliseconds.

25 In another preferred embodiment, where time-of-next transmission scheduling is included in the data frames as a means of conserving power in the multi-station base station, the data frames, in addition to the preamble, channel ID, and temperature words, include time-to-next transmission information. If the "time to next transmission" is represented in seconds, six (6) bits will give zero (0) to sixty-three (63) seconds of wait time. Inclusion of these bits (and the complemented bits) adds an additional twelve (12) bits to each frame and sixty (60) bits to the complete packet, giving a four hundred ninety nine (499) bit transmission. An alternative means

of specifying the "time to next transmission" is to send the number of seconds deviation from the average transmission interval. For instance, if the transmission randomly deviates by plus/minus ten (10) seconds from a nominal value of forty (40) seconds, a five (5) bit time code could be used (range 00-31 seconds or plus/minus 16 seconds). If it is desired to have a much longer interval between transmissions, the actual time and date of the next transmission(s) could be set. This could be represented in BCD digits in seconds/hr/days/month format, or by a count-down time expressed in seconds (or tens of seconds, or hundreds of seconds, and so on.) Other schemes may be employed as well without departing from the inventive concepts.

Referring now to FIGURE 6, generally designated at 100 is a schematic circuit diagram of the RF oscillator of the portable, battery-powered RF transmitter of FIGURE 4. The RF oscillator includes transistor Q1 in a saturated Pierce-like oscillator configuration, preferably resonant at three hundred and fifteen (315) megahertz, with frequency stabilized by SAW resonator marked "SAW1" connected to the base of transistor Q1. A loop antenna marked "LOOP ANT" is preferably etched with the oscillator on a printed circuit board, not shown. ON/OFF keying ("OOK") modulation of the three hundred and fifteen (315) megahertz carrier is provided for by applying zero (0) and positive three (+3) volt logic levels to the data input (resistor R3) from the controller 72 (FIGURE 4). Elements R1, R2, R3, R4 and R5 set the operating point of transistor Q1; (R3 also serves as an input port for modulating the transmitter), elements C4, C5 and C6 in conjunction with the loop antenna provide a tuned output network that attenuates harmonics. C3 is a bypass capacitor to prevent RF energy being fed back to the controller through the data input. Element C1 is a bypass capacitor to provide a low impedance path for the circulation of RF current. C2 couples the output network to the collector of Q1. L1 is the collector inductor.

Referring now to FIGURE 7, generally designated at 110 is a flow chart illustrating the operation of the controller of the portable, battery-powered RF thermometer of the multi-station RF thermometer and alarm system of the present invention.

As shown by a block 112, the processor is operative to initialize, and as shown by a block 114, is operative to determine whether five (5) seconds have elapsed.

If five (5) seconds have elapsed, the processor is operative to check channel identification and battery status as shown by a block 116. Although the processor preferably checks channel ID and battery status every five (5) seconds, other intervals could be employed.

As shown by a block 118, the processor is then operative to determine whether it is time to randomly transmit its data packet of redundant data frames. Any suitable technique, such as a random number generating algorithm, may be employed.

If it is, and time-of-next transmission scheduling is employed, the processor is operative to generate a schedule of random transmission times as shown by a block 120, and then is operative to transmit its data packets as shown by a block 122.

As shown by a block 124, the processor is then operative to determine if thirty (30) seconds have elapsed since the last temperature measurement. If thirty (30) seconds have not elapsed, processing returns to the block 114. Although thirty (30) second temperature measurement intervals are presently preferred, other temperature measurement intervals could be employed.

As shown by a block 126, if thirty (30) seconds have elapsed, the processor is operative to measure the temperature, and processing returns to the block 114.

Referring now to FIGURE 8, generally designated at 130 is a front elevational view of one embodiment of the multichannel base station of the multi-station RF thermometer and alarm system of the present invention. The multichannel base station 130 includes a housing 132, an easy-to-read multi-field reconfigurable display 134 mounted to the housing 132, a scroll key 136, a control panel schematically illustrated by bracket designated 138 and a control panel door 140

that protects the control panel 138 when it is not being used. The base station 130 includes one (1), two (2) position channel switch, a piezo audible alerter and an audible alerter disable switch, not shown. Although a channel setting DIP switch is presently preferred, other channel setting means in the receiver could be employed.

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The control panel 138 includes three (3) alarm keys 142, 144, and 146 respectively marked "set min", "set max", and "done on/off"; a "low/high" "when?" key 148; a "oC/F" key 150; an hour set key 152 marked "hour"; a minute set key 154 marked "minute"; a "12/24" key 156; a month key 158 marked "month"; a day key 160 marked "day" and a year key 162 marked "year".

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The multichannel base station 130 is operable in three (3) basic modes. In a decode/display mode described more fully hereinbelow, the multichannel base station 130 concurrently displays temperature information for each active location (remote and base), as well as displays temperature high and low information for any location selected by depressing the scroll key 136.

In alarm set mode described more fully hereinbelow, the multichannel base station 130 allows the user to independently set alarm minimum and maximum temperature limits for each temperature location by use of the scroll key 136 and the set min, set max, and on/off keys 142, 144, 146.

In alarm announce mode described more fully hereinbelow, the multichannel base station 130 provides audible, visible and/or remote signal indications whenever one or more monitored locations have temperature values that are out-of-bounds.

The C/F key 150 changes the display from centigrade to Fahrenheit in any mode.

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The low/high when? key 148, when depressed, displays the high and low temperatures for locations selected by the scroll key 136, as well as the time when those highs and lows were registered.

The hour, minute and 12/24 keys 152, 154, and 156 set the time; and the month, day, and year keys 158, 160, and 162 set the date.

Description labels, not shown, may be provided on the inside of the door 140 to identify the locations of each of the one or more remote RF thermometers.

Referring now to FIGURE 9, generally designated at 190 is a functional block diagram of the multichannel base station of the multi-station RF thermometer and alarm system of the present invention.

A digital controller 192, preferably a Samsung KS57C2616 microcontroller with internal ROM and RAM, is connected to a local temperature sensor 194 (preferably consisting of a OKI Semiconductor MSM64162 microcontroller and Semitec 103AT-2B thermistor), a receiver 196, a multi-field re-configurable display 198, control panel 200, channel set switches 202 and to visible and audible alarms respectively designated 204, 206.

The local temperature sensor 194 preferably includes a thermistor located in the base station operative to sense the temperature in the environ thereof. Preferably, the local temperature sensor 194 includes a microcontroller, not shown, which measures the local temperature and sends this to the digital controller 192 which processes and displays the data on the display 198 in a manner to be described.

In one preferred embodiment, the digital controller 192 processes data received by the receiver 196 and displays data on the display 198 from up to four (4) remote temperature sensors, although a different number of remote temperature sensors could be employed. The controller 192 also monitors the keypad 200, keeps track of the time and date, and checks for alarm conditions (temperature exceeding user-specified limits at any location). In one embodiment, power is supplied by an external voltage adapter, and the multi-station base station is always "on." In another embodiment, where time-to-next-transmission data is provided, the multi-station base

station is battery powered, waking-up to receive transmissions at scheduled times out of "sleep" mode. A battery backup circuit maintains the clock and user settings in event of power failure or power down. The visible alarm 204, preferably an LED, and the audible alarm 206, preferably a piezoelectric beeper, indicate the presence of an alarm condition.

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Referring now to FIGURE 10, generally designated at 220 is a schematic circuit diagram of the receiver 196 (FIGURE 9) of the multichannel base station of the multi-station RF thermometer and alarm system of the present invention. The receiver 220 includes a tuned circuit illustrated by dashed box 222 that improves selectivity. Capacitors C11, C13, C15 and inductors L2, L3 preferably are tuned to three hundred and fifteen (315) megahertz.

10

An input buffer schematically illustrated by dashed box 224 that minimizes radiation from the antenna is connected to tuned circuit 222. Buffer 224 includes transistor amplifier Q3. Capacitors C12, C14 couple the input signal to the base of transistor Q3, while resistors R6, R10 and R14 bias transistor Q3 to operate in a linear manner. R6 also serves as a collector load resistance. Capacitor C4 is a power supply decoupling capacitor.

15

A demodulator schematically illustrated by dashed box 226 for detecting the received signal is connected to transistor Q3 of the input buffer 222 via coupling capacitor C8. The demodulator includes transistor Q2 operated as a super-regenerative detector. Resistors R3, R4, R13 and R18 define the operating point of transistor Q2. Capacitors C7, C15 and resistors R4, R18 form the quench network for the super-regenerative detector. Inductor L4 serves to isolate the signal voltage from the biasing network. Resistor R15 and capacitor C19 provide a low-pass filter to remove quench-frequency components from the detector output, while the filtered output is coupled to the data slicer input via capacitor C17. Capacitor C1 provides power supply decoupling. Inductor L1 in conjunction with capacitors C5 and C10 form a tank circuit tuned to resonate at three hundred and fifteen (315) megahertz.

20

Data slicer schematically illustrated by dashed box 228 for extracting digital data from the detected signal is connected to the detector 226. The data slicer looks at the detector output, and responds to variations about the average signal level, corresponding to the digital data stream. Operational amplifier marked "U2A" is configured as a non-inverting amplifier to boost the detected signal. Operational amplifier marked "U2B" is configured as a comparator with hysteresis (Schmitt trigger circuit). Resistors R1 and R8 and capacitor C17 couple the demodulated signal to U2A while providing a high-pass filter to remove DC and slowly varying AC components. Resistors R5 and R9 set the gain of U2A. Resistors R1 and R2 provide a reference voltage to the non-inverting input of U2A. Capacitor C18 provides power supply decoupling. Capacitor C9 and resistor R11 low-pass filter the signal going to the inverting input of U2B. Resistors R16 and R17 set the amount of hysteresis. Resistor R16 also couples the U2A output to the U2B non-inverting input.

A level translator schematically illustrated by dashed box 230 is connected to the data slicer 228. With the RF carrier ON, the data output is approximately 0.2 volts; with the RF carrier OFF, the data output is positive five (+5) volts. Transistor Q1 is a clipping amplifier. Resistor R12 couples the data slicer output to the base of Q1. Resistor R7 is the collector resistor. Capacitor C20 prevents RF energy from the digital board from being fed back to the receiver through the data output. Capacitor C6 is a power supply bypass capacitor.

Referring now to FIGURE 11, generally designated at 240 is a state diagram of the controller 192 (FIGURE 9) of the multichannel base station of the multi-station RF thermometer and alarm system of the present invention. As shown by a block 242, the processor is operative in a decode/temperature display mode; as shown by a block 244, is operative in an alarm set mode; and as shown by a block 246 is operative in an alarm announce mode. As shown by an arrow marked "min, max, done" extending between the decode/temperature display mode 242 and the alarm set mode 244, the processor transitions from mode 242 to mode 244 whenever the user presses the min, the max, or the done key 142, 144, or 146 (FIGURE 8).

As shown by an arrow marked “on/off, 20 sec’s” extending between alarm set mode 244 and decode/temperature display mode 242, the processor is operative to transition from the alarm set mode back to the decode/temperature display mode whenever the operator depresses the done on/off key 146 (FIGURE 8), or when twenty (20) seconds of inactivity have elapsed.

5

Whenever an out-of-bounds alarm condition exists at any of the remote and/or base locations, the processor is operative to transition from the temperature display mode 242 to the alarm announce mode 246 as illustrated by an arrow 252 marked “alarm condition.”

10

As illustrated by an arrow marked “on/off” extending from the alarm announce mode 246 to the decode/temperature display mode 242, the processor is operative to transition from the alarm display mode to the decode/temperature display mode whenever the operator pushes the done, on/off key 146 (FIGURE 8).

15

As illustrated by an arrow marked “min, max” extending between the alarm announce mode 246 and the alarm set mode 244, the processor is operative to transition from the alarm announce mode to the alarm set mode whenever the operator depresses the min key 142, or the max key 144 (FIGURE 8).

20

With reference now to FIGURE 12, which shows a pictorial diagram generally designated 270 that illustrates the display of the multi-field re-configurable display configured in decode/display mode, the operation of the multi-channel base station in decode/display mode will now be described. In decode/display mode, the display includes a comparatively-large active location field 270 and five (5) comparatively-smaller temperature station (remote and base) fields generally designated 272. Each of the five (5) temperature station fields 272 includes a temperature field 274, an alarm set field 276, and a station ID field 278.

25

A daily low icon field 280, a daily low temperature field 282, a daily high icon field 284, and a daily high temperature field 286 are provided below the active location field 270. Degree

centigrade and degree Fahrenheit fields 288, 290 are provided immediately to the right of the active location field 270.

Time field 292, and a date field 294, are provided adjacent the bottom of the display.

5

Upon startup, the initial display is called the "idle" display which shows all temperatures for all active locations (base and remote) in the five (5) temperature station fields 272, and displays the base station temperature in the active location field 270. Each location is numbered "1", "2", "3", "4", and "base" in the station identification fields 278. Only locations that have active data are displayed. All other locations remain blank, including their location number. All alarms are initially off. Default is degrees Fahrenheit.

10

A circle, not shown, around the location number is displayed in the station identification field 276 to indicate the active location.

15

The lowest and highest registered temperature in the past twenty four (24) hours (preferably reset at midnight each day) is displayed in the low and high temperature fields 282, 286 below the active large readout temperature field 270, and high and low icons are displayed in the low and high icon fields 280, 284. The temperature display for all locations is oF/oC switchable by depressing the oC/F key 150 (FIGURE 8), and the corresponding icon is displayed in the centigrade and Fahrenheit icon fields 288, 290.

20

If a good signal has not been received from a remote transmitter in a fifteen (15) minute period, a bad signal screen indicator (preferably, "Blank") is displayed in that temperature location field 274. If the faulty location is the active location, then both the large display readout 270 and the smaller temperature display 272 are blanked.

25

For the eleven (11) keys of the control panel 138 (FIGURE 8) accessed by opening the door 140 (FIGURE 8) on the front of the unit, pressing a key once gets you into its function and

pressing it again takes you back out of the function to idle screen. The exception is for "set min" and "set max" keys 142, 144 (FIGURE 8); the "alarm on/off/done" key 146 (FIGURE 8) needs pressed to exit.

5 When in a set up mode (time, date, alarm), if no keys are pressed for twenty (20) seconds, then the display returns to the idle display and any changes made by the operator inside any function are saved. The exception is exiting in "alarm announce" mode, either by pressing the done/on/off key 146 (FIGURE 8) or by pressing the min or max keys 142, 144 (FIGURE 8).

10 The "C/F" key 150 and the "12/24" key 156 (FIGURE 8) alternate between their two modes each time the key is pressed.

15 From idle display, the "low/high/when?" button 148 (FIGURE 8) when pressed flashes the daily low icon in the daily low icon field 280 while it shows the active location temperature and the hours/minutes when this daily low temperature was recorded. After five (5) seconds, the display flashes "daily high" for five (5) seconds in the daily high icon field 284 and shows temperature and time of day when the daily high was reached, then returns to idle display.

20 The sound on/off slide switch, on the side of the unit, not shown, controls the piezoalerter 206 (FIGURE 9). In the "off" state all sounds including the key click sound is turned off.

 Whenever a user presses an incorrect key a negative (5) quick beeps sound is heard and no changes are made.

25 When in time change mode, if the "12/24" key 156 (FIGURE 8) is pressed, then it toggles and leaves time change mode, saves any changes made, and returns to the idle screen.

 When in any set mode, if the receiver receives data from a transmitter it saves it and updates the display only after the operator exits from the set mode.

With reference now to FIGURE 13, which shows a pictorial diagram generally designated 300 of the multi-field re-configurable display configured in "alarm set" mode, the operation of the processor in alarm set mode will now be described. The set alarms display 300 is generally the same as the idle display of FIGURE 12, except that the daily high and low icon and temperature fields are reconfigured to display minimum and maximum icons 302, 304 and minimum and maximum value fields 306, 308; and except that a "set temperature" icon field 310 is provided.

When a user presses the "set min" or "set max" buttons 142, 144 (FIGURE 8), the display changes from the idle display to the "set alarms" display. In the set alarms display, the active location is the only temperature shown (in the lower temperature area 272 and in the larger upper display area 270). The daily high/low values disappear, and are replaced by the min and max alarm range temperature values in the min and max value fields 306, 308. When the current temperature location goes outside these values, then the alarm mode to be described for this location becomes active.

Alarm min/max values are set one location at a time. The first time the "set min" or "set max" buttons 142, 144 (FIGURE 8) are pressed, the "min" number shows five (5) degrees below the current temperature of that location and the "max" value starts at five (5) degrees above the current temperature in the min and max value fields 306, 308. After this, when entering new set min and set max values, the values will be the previously set values.

To set the minimum and maximum temperature targets for a location, the scroll bar 136 (FIGURE 8) is depressed to select the location to set. In the set alarms display mode, the active location is the only temperature shown in the temperature station fields 272 and in the active location field 270.

The set min key 142 (FIGURE 8) is depressed once. The words "set min" start flashing in the minimum field 302 and "set temperature alarm" is displayed in the set temperature icon field 310.

The scroll bar 136 (FIGURE 8) is then depressed to adjust the temperature limit up or down until the desired number is reached. Adjustment occurs one-tenth (0.1) degrees at a time at a rate of two (2.0) degrees per second. When in alarm min/max set mode, the scroll rate goes to five (5) degrees/second if the scroll key 136 (FIGURE 8) is held for more than three (3) seconds.

In a similar manner, the set max key 144 is depressed and the scroll bar 136 (FIGURE 8) is then depressed to adjust the maximum temperature as well, whereupon the set max words start flashing in the max icon field 304.

To exit alarm set mode, the done key 146 (FIGURE 8) is depressed. The alarm mode is automatically switched to "on" upon exit. An icon appears in the alarm set field 276 beside the location number in the station identification field 278 to indicate that this location is now in the "on" state. At the top the display, the daily low and high temperatures being displayed for that location are replaced with the min and max set temperatures for that location while the alarm is in the "on" condition.

When in the alarm set mode the minimum temperature cannot go above the maximum temperature and the maximum temperature cannot go below the minimum. A beep is heard if min and max become equal.

With reference now to FIGURE 14, which shows a pictorial diagram generally designated 330 of the multi-field re-configurable display configured in alarm announce mode, the operation of the processor in alarm announce mode will now be described. The alarm announce mode display 330 is generally the same as the alarm set display 300 (FIGURE 13), except that the set temperature icon field is reconfigured as a temperature alarm icon field 332, and an LED alarm 334 and an audible alarm, not shown, are enabled.

If the temperature of any location goes outside the min-max alarm range and the alarm for that location has been turned on (icon displayed in the alarm set field 276 beside the location identifier in the station identification field 278), then an alarm announce state exists and the display goes into the "alarm announce" display mode. The location with the alarm becomes the active location and is the only location that shows on the display (in the lower 272 and upper 270 display areas). The "temperature alarm" icon is displayed in the temperature alarm icon field 332, and it flashes. The LED 334 flashes, the "alarm on" icon in the temperature alarm icon field 332 flashes, and if sound is "on", the sound beeps.

To exit the alarm announce state, the operator can do several things. (All keys except min, max, and done are locked out and cannot be used). The operator can press the alarm on/off button 146 (FIGURE 8) which turns the alarm on/off icon off and, after one (1) seconds, the display returns to idle mode display. The operator could also press either the "set min" or "set max" buttons 142, 144 (FIGURE 8) and the display immediately goes to the "set alarms" display mode and the operator may adjust the min-max range to turn off the alarm in the manner described above. If the operator leaves the "set alarm" mode and an alarm condition still exists, then the display returns to the idle display for one (1) second, then returns to the "alarm announce" display.

When a multiple alarm condition exists, then the "alarm announce" display shows all locations in the temperature station fields 272 that have an alarm condition. The "active" location is the location with the lowest number (e.g., "1" instead of "3", or "2" instead of "3", etc.; "base" location is location "0"). The operator depresses the scroll key 136 (FIGURE 8) to handle each alarm state, one location at a time, in the manner described above. When an alarm is cleared, then after one (1) second, that location disappears from the display and the next lowest number location become the "active" location. When the last location is cleared, then the display waits two (2) seconds and returns to idle display.

If a good signal has not been received from a remote transmitter in a fifteen (15) minute period, that temperature location goes blank, indicating a bad transmission. If the faulty location

is the active location, then both the large display read out and the smaller temperature display with the location number defaults to the base as the active location.

Referring now to FIGURE 15, generally designated at 350 is a flow chart of the processor of the multi-channel base station of the multi-station RF thermometer and alarm system of the present invention. As shown by a block 352, the processor is operative to determine if any temperature data is available. In one embodiment, the processor is always on, monitoring for temperature data. In another, it is "asleep," waking up at scheduled times to monitor for temperature data. Any suitable data monitoring technique, such as an interrupt, may be employed.

If data is available, the processor is operative to determine whether two (2) frames of the redundantly transmitted data match as shown by a block 354.

As shown by a block 356, if two (2) frames match, the processor is operative to update the system data. System data includes the time of last receipt and the minimum and maximum received temperature values received in a twenty four hour period.

As shown by a block 358, the processor is then operative to determine whether the received temperature data is out of bounds.

If it is, as shown by a block 360, the processor is operative to update the display, and to transition to alarm mode as shown by a block 362.

If no temperature data is available, or if two (2) frames of the redundantly transmitted data do not match for a given channel, or if there is no out of bounds conditions, the processor is operative to determine whether there has been a key press as shown by a block 364.

If there was a key press on the control panel, the processor is operative to handle the key press as shown by a block 366 and to update system data as appropriate.

As shown by a block 368, if the keypress input changed operating mode, the processor is operative to transition to alarm set mode as shown by a block 368.

As shown by a block 370, the processor is then operative to determine whether any data is older than fifteen (15) minutes since the last temperature data was received.

If it is, the processor is operative to blank the record as shown by a block 372.

As shown by a block 374, the processor is then operative to update the display, and processing returns to the block 352.

Referring now to FIGURE 16, generally designated at 400 is an elevational view of the front of another embodiment of the RF weather station of the multi-station RF thermometer and alarm system of the present invention. The RF weather station 400 includes a water-resistant housing 402, a first weather parameter sensing probe connected to the housing 402 via an elongated flexible waterproof cable that senses temperature, not shown, a second weather parameter sensing probe within housing 402 that senses percent relative humidity, not shown, and a display 404. Like the embodiment described above in connection with the description of FIGURES 2 and 3, a chamber, not shown, is provided in the housing 402 in which the cable of the temperature probe may be stowed and payed-out to allow the probe to reach intended temperature measurement locations as determined by the needs of each particular applications environment. A weather station location identification switch, preferably a sequential select switch, not shown, is mounted to the housing 402 to allow user selection of weather station location number, and a Centigrade/Fahrenheit switch, not shown, is mounted to the housing 402 to allow user selection of temperature scales. The display 404 displays the temperature sensed by the selectably extendable first probe mounted to the housing, and displays indicia representative of the selected weather station location number, and of the temperature scale selected. The display 404 also displays indicia representative that a data packet to be described is being telemetered. The RF weather station 400 is battery-powered, is operational from minus forty (40) degrees

Fahrenheit to one hundred twenty-two (122) degrees Fahrenheit, and has a range of up to about two hundred fifty (250) feet.

Referring now to FIGURE 17, generally designated at 420 is a functional block diagram of the portable, battery-powered RF weather station of the multi-station RF thermometer and alarm system of the present invention. Digital controller 422, operatively connected to RAM memory 424 and ROM memory 426, is connected to sequential-select station identifying switch 428 (and Centigrade/Fahrenheit scale select switch), temperature sensor 430, humidity sensor 432, LCD display 434, and to the three hundred fifteen (315) MHZ oscillator 436 described above in connection with the description of FIGURES 4 and 6, not separately described again for the sake of brevity of explication. In use, each RF weather station is set to a different station identification number by the sequential-select station identifying switch 428. The ROM 426 includes plural unique transmission schedules to be described, another one of which is selected for each setting of the sequential-select station identification switch 428. For the three (3) station identification switch settings of the preferred embodiment, another one of three (3) unique transmission schedules, preferably {60 seconds +/- 1 second}, {60 seconds +/- 5 seconds}, and {60 seconds +/- 10 seconds}, is selected. For example, location "3" will transmit repetitively alternately at fifty (50) seconds and seventy (70) seconds. Although two-phase repeat schedules are presently preferred, more than two (2) phase schedules, one-time phase offsets at the time of start-up to promote substantially contention-free reception, or other unique schedules to substantially preclude contention-induced interference at the receiver and to allow the receiver to enter low-power mode until the time of next transmission, could be employed without departing from the inventive concepts.

The controller 422 preferably is the OKI Semiconductor MSM64162. The temperature sensor 430 preferably is the Semitec 103AT-2B thermistor. The humidity sensor preferably is the Shinyei Kaisha C5-M3 humidity sensor. The LCD display 434 preferably is a custom-manufactured display.

The controller 422 (1) measures the resistance of the thermistor of the temperature sensor 430 and numerically calculates the temperature corresponding thereto, (2) measures the resistance of the humidity sensor 432 and calculates the humidity corresponding thereto, (3) encodes a data packet having first data representative of data type, weather station ID and phase of the two-phase transmission schedule, and redundant second data representative of weather parameter sensed, and (4) controls the RF oscillator 436 to transmit the data frame having the encoded data packets at preselected times. In the preferred embodiment, the controller 422 alternatively transmits temperature data and humidity data in sequential data packets, although any other method may be selected for telemetry of multiple weather parameter data. The controller 422 performs the functions of displaying the temperature on the liquid crystal display 434 and the indicia representative of station identification, active transmission, temperature scale selected, as well as checks the battery voltage.

In the preferred embodiment, the controller 422 transmits in accord with the particular unique transmission schedule selected approximately once per minute. The average duty cycle of any transmission does not exceed twenty-five (25) percent, permitting a twelve (12) dB increase in the peak output power from the transmitter. The transmission consists of a preamble, a sync word, and a setup word followed by two identical data frames, as shown in FIGURE 18.

A modified Manchester-like encoding technique that maximizes receiver sensitivity and provides higher output peak power than the embodiment of FIGURES 2-7 is preferably used for the entire transmission, where a "1" is represented by the pulse sequence "1000" and a "0" is represented by the pulse sequence "0100." The "1" in each pulse sequence indicates the transmitter is pulsed on for four and one-half (4.5) milliseconds, while the "0" indicates that the transmitter is turned off for four and one-half (4.5) milliseconds. This coding technique in accord with the present invention provides the twenty-five (25) percent duty cycle, and its accompanying improvement in higher output peak power, and also insures that the transmitter cannot be on for more than one (1) consecutive four and one-half (4.5) millisecond interval, which helps to maximize receiver sensitivity by minimizing "ripple" in the data slicer circuit.

For example, if a digital "7" is to be sent, which is "0111" in standard BCD representation, it first is transformed in accord with the modified Manchester encoding technique of the present invention, and transmitted as "0100 1000 1000 1000." It takes sixteen (16) pulses instead of four (4) bits as a bit is represented by four (4) pulses. Since there are only four (4) high pulses (1's) and twelve (12) low pulses (0's), the average energy output is twenty-five (25) percent "on" and seventy-five (75) percent "off." When data is joined, two "1's" are never present side-by-side as a zero (0) is always at least at one end. This maximizes receiver sensitivity. High pulses butted together become a single double-duration pulse, which has the undesirable effect of increasing voltage ripple in the data slicer, thus degrading its sensitivity. This undesirable effect is overcome by the encoding technique of the present invention, which makes the data look as much as possible like a continuous stream of "1000 1000 1000 1000 1000"

The preamble is a string of "1000 1000 1000" followed by the sync pulse which is two (2) high periods in length. The redundantly encoded weather data immediately follows.

Example of Complete Transmission:

DATA STREAM:

PREAMBLE (fixed pattern)	SYNC (wide pulse)	SETUP (xxx)	DATA FRAME1 (yyyy)
		humidity/temp. phase battery low	
DATA FRAME2 (zzzz)			

example:

1000100010001	00011000	100001001000	
PREAMBLE	SYNC	encoded " 101" SETUP DATA	
0100010001000100/0100100010000100/0100100001001000/000010010001000			
DATA FRAME1			
encoded "0000"	"0110"	"0101"	"0011"
0	6	5	3
(encoded 65.3 C temperature)			

0100010001000100/0100100010000100/0100100001001000/000010010001000
DATA FRAME2

Data frame2 is identical to data frame1.

5

Referring now to FIGURE 19, generally designated at 440 is a flow chart illustrating the operation of the controller of the portable, battery-powered RF weather station of the multi-station RF thermometer and alarm system of the present invention.

10

As shown by block 442, the processor is operative to initialize and to determine the number and kind of weather parameter sensors and the station identification number.

15

As shown by block 444, the processor is operative to measure the value of the active sensors. In the preferred embodiment, where temperature and humidity sensors are present, the processor is alternatively operative to measure temperature and humidity preferably every five (5) seconds.

20

As shown by block 446, the processor is operative to convert measured sensor data to a corresponding temperature and/or humidity weather parameter. Preferably, the processor of the transmitter of each battery-powered weather station computes the relevant weather parameter, thereby off-loading that task away from the processor of the receiver, although unconverted sensor data could be transmitted.

25

As shown by block 448, the processor is operative to display the current temperature data and the location identification number.

As shown by block 450, the processor is then operative to determine the time-to-next transmission and waits until that time as shown by block 452.

As shown by block 454, the processor then transmits the encoded data packet at the prescheduled time, and processing returns to block 444.

Referring now to FIGURE 20A, generally designated at 460 is a front elevational view of another embodiment of the multichannel base station of the multi-station RF thermometer and alarm system of the present invention. The multichannel base station 460 includes a housing 462, an easy-to-read multi-field re-configurable display 464 mounted to housing 462, a scroll-up and scroll-down key 466, a daily high/low and temperature alarm setting key 468, and a reset/heat index key 470. The display 464 includes a comparatively-large, upper portion and a comparatively-smaller, lower portion. The enlarged display portion shows the temperature of a selected active location, (or selectably its heat index if that location monitors both temperature and humidity), and the smaller display portion simultaneously shows for each of the remote weather stations and the base station as identified by the illustrated "1," "2," "3," and "base" indicia the current temperatures (or percent relative humidity, for location(s) that monitor both temperature and humidity, as indicated by the icon "%" for location "2" in FIGURES 20A, B). An indication as shown by the "triangle" icon above location "2" is provided as to which location is currently selected for display in the upper portion. Depression of the scroll key 466 selects an active location for display in the upper portion of the display 464, as shown in FIGURE 20B, and depression of the daily high/low and alarm setting key 468 displays daily low, daily high, alarm min, and alarm max for any selected active location in the lower portion of the display 464, as shown in FIGURE 20C. Depression of the reset/heat index key 470 displays the numeric value of the heat index in the upper portion of the display 464 for a selected active location and the indicia "heat index," not shown, and depression of the reset/heat index key 470 following depression of the daily high/low and alarm setting key 468 resets the period during which the daily high and daily low values are recorded. A temperature alarm "on" indicator illustrated by a "bell" icon in the upper left corner of the display 464 indicates temperature alarm "armed" status. Below that, a radio transmission indicator illustrated by icon "(.)" and a temperature trend indicator illustrated by the upwardly directed "arrow" in the upper portion of the display 464 respectively indicate when telemetry is being received and the direction and speed of temperature change of

any active location selected. A flashing "bell" icon is shown in the lower portion of the display 464 for any active location that has an out-of-bounds alarm condition. A low battery indicator and a temperature alarm LED, both not shown, respectively provide an indication of low battery power and a visible indication of an out-of-bounds alarm condition. A piezoalerter, not shown, provides an audible indication of an out-of-bounds alarm condition. A temperature scale selector switch, an alarm on/off key, and a sync key, all not shown, are respectively provided to select temperature scale, turn alarm mode on/off, and initiate sync mode whenever, for example, new remote weather stations are added or it is otherwise desirable to(re)acquire remote weather station's telemetry. Opposite the "bell" icon, indicia, such as the illustrated "F," shows the temperature scale selected.

Referring now to FIGURE 21, generally designated at 480 is a functional block diagram of the multichannel base station of the multi-station RF thermometer and alarm system of the present invention.

A digital controller 482, preferably a Samsung KS57C2308/16 microcontroller with internal ROM and RAM, is connected to a local temperature sensor 484 (preferably consisting of the OKI Semiconductor MSM64162 microcontroller and the Semitec 103 AT-2B thermistor), the receiver 486 (described above in connection with the description of FIGURE 10, not separately described again for the sake of brevity of explication), multi-field re-configurable display 488, keypad 490, and to visible and audible alarms respectively designated 492, 494. The controller 482 is battery-powered, and turns the receiver 486 "on" and "off" at times scheduled to receive transmissions from active locations as determined by reception clocks 496. For the presently preferred embodiment that monitors telemetry from three (3) remote weather stations of the type described above in connection with the description of FIGURES 16-19, three (3) reception clocks are maintained, but a different number could be employed in accord with the present invention.

Referring now to FIGURE 22, generally designated at 500 is a state diagram of the controller 482 (FIGURE 21) of the multichannel base station of the multi-station RF thermometer

and alarm system of the present invention. As shown by a block 502, the processor is operative in a decode/display mode; and as shown by a block 504, is operative in an alarm set mode.

In decode/display mode, the controller is operative to identify which remote locations are active and to set the reception clocks 496 (FIGURE 21) for each location identified as active. Once active locations are acquired, the controller powers-down the receiver 486 (FIGURE 21) except at times when transmissions are scheduled, which conserves battery power and provides long-life operation. When transmissions are scheduled, the controller powers-up the receiver 486 (FIGURE 21), decodes received data packets, and updates the display when received telemetry is in proper format and the redundantly transmitted data frames match. It powers-down the receiver thereafter, or if there is no data frame match, or if the data format is improper. It lowers its clock speed when it powers-down the receiver, also to conserve battery power and improve useful battery life; vice versa, it raises its clock speed when transmissions are expected. The controller in decode/display mode handles key presses; monitors and displays temperature trends; maintains a record, and selectably displays, the daily high and low values for active locations; monitors and displays out-of-bounds alarm conditions; selectably displays the heat index; as well as provides the other audible and visible indicators described above in connection with the description of FIGURE 20.

When a temperature alarm sounds in decode/display mode, there are two (2) ways to turn the alarm "off." Either the alarm on/off button is depressed to turn the alarm function "off" for all active locations, or the active alarm location is selected and the daily temperature/alarm set button is depressed to reset the alarm bounds in alarm set mode to be described.

Whenever the heat index key is depressed in decode/display mode, the controller is operative to calculate and display heat index for the active location selected. Heat index is a more accurate measurement of comfort than temperature alone, i.e., it provides "apparent temperature," what the temperature really feels like. It not only is a useful comfort indicator, but it may prove invaluable in times when temperature and humidity can lead to dangerous heatstroke levels. For

example, with a temperature of one hundred (100) degrees Fahrenheit and a relative humidity of sixty (60) percent, the temperature will actually feel like one hundred thirty (130) degrees Fahrenheit. Preferably, the following algorithm is used to calculate heat index. $HI = -42.379 + (2.04901523 * T) - (0.22475541 * T * H) - (0.00683783 * T * T) - (0.05481717 * H * H) + (0.00122874 * T * H) + (0.00085282 * T * H * H) - (0.00000199 * T * T * H * H)$, where "HI" is heat index, "T" is temperature in degrees Fahrenheit and "H" is percent relative humidity. Although heat index could be calculated for each combination of humidity and temperature, it is preferred that a look-up data table, not shown, be employed for this purpose.

As shown by an arrow marked "alarm 'on/off'" extending between the decode/display mode 502 and the alarm set mode 504, the processor transitions from mode 502 to mode 504 whenever the user presses the alarm "on/off" key. To set or reset temperature alarm limits in alarm set mode upon depression of the alarm on/off button, the scroll key is depressed to select an active location for which alarm limits are to be set. The daily temperature/alarm set button is depressed to display daily high/daily low temperatures and temperature alarm lower and upper limits in the lower portion of the display 464 (FIGURE 20); the alarm min icon will flash showing it is in "set" mode. The scroll keys are depressed to adjust the lower temperature alarm limit. After that has been set, depression again of the daily temperature/alarm set button accepts the lower range limit, and the alarm max field icon will then start flashing. The scroll keys are again depressed to adjust the upper temperature limit. Depression of the daily temperature/alarm set button accepts that value, and as shown by the arrow extending from the alarm set mode 504 to the decode/display mode 502, the controller returns to the decode/display mode 502.

Referring now to FIGURE 23, generally designated at 510 is a flowchart of the processor of the multi-channel base station of the multi-station RF thermometer and alarm system of the present invention. As shown by block 512, the processor is operative to identify active locations, set the reception clocks for each active location identified, and to extract valid weather data. As shown by block 514, the processor then displays the temperature and/or humidity weather data recovered for each active location on the display.

A shown by block 516, the processor is next operative to determine whether a predetermined interval, preferably three (3) minutes, has elapsed. If the time interval expired is less than the predetermined interval, processing returns to block 512. After the elapse of the predetermined interval (or if maximum number of locations have been found), the processor powers the receiver down as shown by block 518. Although a three (3) minute sync period to acquire active locations is presently preferred, other intervals could be employed.

As shown by block 520, the processor is next operative to determine if a key has been depressed. If it has, the processor is operative to handle the keypress and to update system data as appropriate, as shown by block 522. If the key is the sync key, processing branches to block 512, and if the key is the alarm on/off key, processing jumps to alarm set mode as shown by block 524.

Otherwise, the processor as shown by block 526 is operative to determine if the current time is equal to any one (1) of the reception clocks time's. If it is, the processor is operative to power the receiver up (and to raise its clock rate) as shown by block 528 and to determine if data is available as shown by block 530. If it is, the processor is operative to determine whether the redundantly transmitted frames match as shown by block 534, and updates system data and compensates the reception clocks for drift as shown by block 536. The processor is then operative to determine whether the temperature data is out-of-bounds for any active location as shown by block 538 and, if it is, to update system data as shown by block 540 and to power the receiver down (and lower its clock rate) as shown by block 532. But if no data is available, or if the redundant frames do not match, or if the temperature data is not out-of-bounds, the processor is operative to power the receiver down (and lower its clock rate) as shown by the block 532.

Otherwise, the processor is operative to determine whether any records are older than one (1) hour as shown by block 540. If not, the processor updates the display as shown by block 544. If they are, the processor is operative to blank those records as shown by block 542, and then to

